

[Josephine Wallace]

West Durham Cotton Mill

West Durham, N. C.

July 5, 1938

I. L. M.

JOSEPHINE WALLACE

If you should meet Josephine Wallace you would more than likely say to yourself, "With a little more 'finish' she'd be a good-looking woman." She has a high forehead, well-shaped nose and mouth, and nice blue eyes. She keeps abreast of the styles—perhaps a little too well—and she is never without a permanent wave. Although she has worked in a cotton mill a good part of her life she does not look more than her forty years.

The ambition of Josephine's life is to keep her five children, more particularly her two daughters, out of the mill. She does not mind the hard work she does each day because it is to provide advantages for her children. She is making seventeen dollars a week and her husband twenty-two. They apparently dread the impending wage out more than some families of lesser means because they hate to curtail in any measure the standard of living they have worked out for their family.

If you should go to the Wallace home in all probability you would be greeted by one of Josephine's neatly dressed and well-mannered children who would enter into conversation with you as soon as you were both seated in the living-room. The living room is a cheerful, homey place despite the misapplication of color and the lack of taste in choice of ornaments. The door prop is a big china cat which curls itself in indolent laziness and 2

Library of Congress

manages to gaze at you no matter where you are seated. The mantel is adorned with two miniature covered wagons, one polar bear, a cat group, and a china center piece which features a little girl looking at a dog and asking, "Can't you talk?" Wherever you turn in the room you are likely to see a gaudy-looking piece of statuary but in a little while you do not mind. Even the too much greenness of the flowered rug which is vying with the colorful drapery ceases to annoy you. Inevitably you reach the conclusion that the people who live here have created for themselves a home.

The Wallaces are congenial among themselves and they find friends who share their interest in music. The bad-toned piano is the pride of the household. If Ira Belle, the 17 year old daughter, were to come in during your visit she would ask you if you could play certain tunes and with a request that she play them for you should would respond readily. She might play Tippy-Tippy-Ten, a number or two from Snow White, several others from recent pictures, and almost certainly Duke University's song. Ira Belle will take from the music rack a number of hymn-books and hand them to you for your inspection. Among them will be a compilation by Gypsy Smith, a favorite of hers. Her grand-father Carrington who was born in England has told her that when 3 he was a lad he ran away from home and lived for a while with the gypsy tribe to which Gypsy Smith belonged. When you put the books aside Ira Belle will play for you a number of hymns which she and members of her family have sung in duet and quartet combinations at the local churches during revivals.

The Wallace children are proud of their mother and father. Josephine has told her children that their father traces his ancestry back to the Wallace clan that saved the Crown of Scotland, and that gives the two girls a certain feeling of security as they attend the Durham High School. Ira Belle thinks that many more of the mill girls would go on through high school if they were not made to feel inferior by classmates who have had superior advantages. The past year she was secretary of her section, in which, as she expresses it "All the girls were nice, smart girls and none of them high falutin'." Both of the girls say

Library of Congress

that Josephine has always seen to it that they were as neatly dressed as anybody in their classes.

One point of pride with Josephine's children is the fact that their father who had very little grade school education passed a correspondence course dealing with arithmetic. Josephine herself went through the seventh grade because a certain security in her home made it necessary for her to start to work until she was fourteen.

Josephine Wallace is the oldest of five children born to David and Josephine Carrington. David, one of six children, was 4 born in Bidston, Cheshire County, England. His father, a watchmaker and diamond setter, sent him to grade school from the time he was three until he was eleven. At eleven he entered Brassie's Shipyard and worked until he was fifteen. Joining the English navy then he served for eight years and came out a skilled mechanic. Service had brought him to the Atlantic Coast of the United States and in David's words he had become a "free-thinker and wanted to spend the rest of his days in the United States. England in those days was too conservative for me." Shortly thereafter, having made his way to North Carolina, he met and married Josephine Smith who lived in the backwoods country near Sanford. Josephine had to her credit only six months of schooling. Her father had come home from the War between the States crippled with arthritis and unable to do manual labor at all. His girls worked hard on the small farm which he owned and managed to subsist in a meager sort of way. David's skill as a mechanic, when a skilled mechanic was hard to find, made it possible for him to keep a job and make Josephine's life a little easier than it had been. Soon after he was married his pay was increased from seventy-five cents to a dollar and a quarter a day. When he told Josephine the good news she exclaimed "My Lord, that makes us rich folks for sure." She says that no money has ever made her prouder than that first week's wages with the raise for it seemed such a big amount after the lean., hard days she'd known on the farm. From then on David made a fairly decent living for his family and by the year 1912 he had a small bank account. 5 At that time letters from England reminded him that his mother was ageing fast and her health was failing. David could not overcome the desire to see his mother again. He sold

Library of Congress

all of his property except his household goods and with his wife and three children went to England. After a month's visit among his people, David and his family returned to North Carolina on the Aquitania.

Shortly after his return David secured a job as a mill mechanic in West Durham and he has been there since. Josephine as the oldest of the children felt the need of contributing to the family at an earlier age than the others. Then, too, all the girls of her age that she knew had entered the mill. Her younger brothers and sisters attained the age of fifteen before their life in the mill began. One of her brothers is married to a nurse and one of her sisters whose husband owns two houses in Asheville is supervisor in a cigarette factory in Richmond. The other brother and sister are married and working in the same mill with Josephine.

Josephine is proud of her father and mother. She likes to tell you that the older Josephine, now sixty-one, got another permanent last week. She will look at the large photograph of her which stands on the piano, and say "That's a good picture but lot of folks have told me they didn't think it done mama justice." If her father's name is brought into the conversation she will probably tell that he is a thirty-second degree Mason. 6 Josephine's ambition for her children is hardly more pronounced than is her husband's. He is determined to educate his children so that they may make a living of which they will not be ashamed. Though Tom Wallace's father became Chief of Police of Burlington before his death, the older ones of his seven children knew many hard days and were glad of a chance to work in the mill when they were no more than ten or eleven years old.

The Wallaces have not saved any money during their married life but they have provided their children with a respectable home. If Josephine's health holds out and the mill continues to need them both they plan to send all their children through high school and to give the two girls business training to equip them for the profession of court stenographer.